

Ernie Fletcher
Governor

LaJuana S. Wilcher
Secretary
Environmental and Public
Protection Cabinet



Environmental Quality Commission

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Environmental Quality Commission

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November 3, 2004

The Honorable Ernie Fletcher
State Capitol
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Governor Fletcher:

The Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission (EQC), a seven-member citizen advisory board, would like to present you with the enclosed copy of our report on *Children's Environmental Health in Kentucky*.

For some time EQC has been monitoring environmental trends and conditions in Kentucky. These investigations have revealed that we have made much progress in restoring water and air quality, but much more remains to be done to reverse the negative effects of pollution on the environment and public health. This is especially true when it comes to the health of our children. In Kentucky, children represent 25 percent of the state's population and 100 percent of our future. Children are more exposed and more vulnerable to hazards in the environment. Pound for pound, children breathe more air, drink more fluids, and eat more food than do adults.

While children are better protected with the advancement of vaccines and medicines they are still subject to a number of health threats including asthma, learning disabilities, cancer, waterborne diseases and birth defects. Many of these threats can be linked to environmental hazards. Protecting children from environmental hazards requires that we better understand the relationship between environmental conditions and health outcomes.

I believe that the EQC *Children's Environmental Health in Kentucky* report is the state's first comprehensive look at the incidence of certain childhood illnesses such as asthma and cancer and their potential relationship to the environment. This core set of 18 indicators along with county data, which is included on a CD-Rom version of the report attached to the back cover, is intended to improve our understanding about children's environmental health and advance strong and sustaining children's environmental health policies in the Commonwealth.

While Kentucky has several programs to address children's environmental health issues, the findings in our report call to the need for these programs to be better coordinated and strengthened. The bottom line is that our children's environment, where he or she lives, plays and learns, deserves special attention and protection from environmental contaminants so they can enjoy the highest quality of life and achieve their maximum potential.

With that in mind, EQC recommends the state create a Children's Environmental Health Partnership composed of environmental and health experts from state government, academia and health care and environmental health professionals to develop a statewide action plan to:

- Strengthen Health Surveillance programs for children.
Improve collection, coordination and use of health surveillance data to assess children's environmental health and help identify potential problem areas.
- Build Public Awareness among physicians, health care providers, schools and employers.
Build and strengthen awareness of children's environmental health issues in Kentucky among health care providers as well as state decision-makers, employers, school administrators and the general public.

- Better Utilize Existing Resources.
Promote the use of existing resources such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Southeast Pediatric Environmental Specialty Unit at Emory University in Atlanta, which is funded in part by the state of Kentucky
- Evaluate and update state health standards.
Review state health standards to ensure they incorporate new information and are focused on vulnerable populations such as children.
- Prioritize and Target High Risks.
Conduct better tracking of childhood diseases through the expanded use of the state Geographic Information System and other tools.
- Promote Safe and Pollution Free Indoor Environments.
Target schools, daycares, homes and other public places to advance safe and healthy pollution-free indoor environments for children.

Kentucky needs your leadership to advance a Children's Health Partnership forward in Kentucky. Please feel free to call Leslie Cole, Executive Director of the Commission, or me if you have any questions or wish to discuss these recommendations further.

Thank you for your interest in this important matter and your continuing efforts to make Kentucky an environmentally healthy place for our children to grow and prosper.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lindell Ormsbee", written in a cursive style.

Lindell Ormsbee, Chair
Environmental Quality Commission

Cc: LaJuana S. Wilcher, Secretary, Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet
Dr. James Holsinger, Health and Families Cabinet
Virginia Fox, Secretary, Education Cabinet
Gene Wilhoit, Commissioner, Department of Education